

Guidance for Food Establishments: Restrictions on Public Gatherings and Social Distancing Requirements

On [March 12, 2020](#), Governor Ralph Northam declared a state of emergency in the Commonwealth of Virginia in response to the continued spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in which he asked Virginians to avoid non-essential gatherings of more than 10 people. The [Centers for Disease Control](#) (CDC) also advises limiting gatherings to reduce the spread of COVID-19 within the community. To further mitigate the spread of this virus, effective [March 17, 2020](#) food establishments are mandated to reduce their capacity to 10 patrons, or close to the public.

In an effort to provide guidance to food establishments on how to operate in adherence to guidelines for protecting public health, the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) provides the following key concepts and recommendations.

Social Distancing: What is Social Distancing?

- Social distancing refers to interventions that communities can implement to keep groups of people from coming together and to allow for more physical space between people when they do congregate. Properly implemented, social distancing is an important strategy to reduce opportunities for the spread of COVID-19 in our community.

Ways to Encourage Social Distancing in a Food Establishment

- **Reduce seating to no more than 10 patrons.**
- Arrange seating to allow for at least six (6) feet of distance between tables/booths.
- Suspend service to standing patrons and bar seating.
- Consider allowing only takeout or delivery orders.
- Help customers maintain 6 feet spacing between parties while waiting to pick up orders.
- Consider partnering with an online food ordering or delivering platform.
- Limit patrons to no more than 10 people.

Suggested Control Measures to Reduce the Spread of COVID-19 in Food Establishments

- **Talk with your workers about employee health requirements and expectations.**
 - Food workers, including managers, with symptoms of coughing, shortness of breath, fever, or other symptoms of illness should not return to work until they are symptom-free.
 - Employers are encouraged not to require employees to provide a doctor's note to return to work, because doing so will burden the medical system.
- **Do not offer self-service of foods, including for condiments and beverages, where multiple guests may handle common utensils.**
- **Perform routine environmental cleaning**
 - Routinely clean frequently touched surfaces, including menus and digital ordering systems, countertops, doors and door handles, etc., with cleaners and disinfectants that are [EPA-approved for emerging viral pathogens](#). Use all cleaning products according to the directions on the label.
- **Additional precautions for employees and customers**
 - Keep employee and customer bathrooms stocked with soap and paper towels. Handwashing is one of the best ways to prevent COVID-19 transmission.
 - Ensure adequate supply and convenient placement of alcohol-based hand sanitizers for use by persons inside food establishments.
 - Provide extra supplies of napkins or tissues for customers to use when coughing or sneezing.

For additional information related to COVID-19, please visit: www.vdh.virginia.gov.

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